Approaches to metaphor: Structure, classifications, cognate phenomena

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Abstract

The article aspires to present a systematized view on the contemporary understanding of metaphor essence and structure, reviews various classifications of metaphor, and discusses cognate 'similarity-based' phenomena in natural language. The opposing views on metaphor as a three- and two-component structure are reconciled in the article through the analysis of different kinds of metaphors. Three types of classifications of metaphor — semantic, structural and functional — are specified and reviewed. Finally, the article examines the cognate phenomena, viz. metaphoric personification (prosopopoeia, pathetic fallacy, apostrophe), animalification, metaphoric antonomasia, metaphoric allusion, metaphoric periphrasis, synesthesia, allegory, and metaphoric symbolism.

Possibly no other complex semiotic phenomenon has received such a broad theoretic coverage as metaphor. Aristotle, Rousseau, Lomonosov, Hegel, Nietzsche, Cassirer, Ortega-y-Gasset, Ricouer and other prominent thinkers have tapped at the ontological roots of metaphor; in philology and linguistics (including theory of literature, etymology, linguistic pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics) the concept of metaphor has been developed by such deceased and living scholars as A. Kuhn, M. Müller, A. Potebnya, I. A. Richards, M. Black, R. Jakobson, K. Burke, P. Wheelwright, C. Brook-Rose, L. J. Cohen, J. Searle, S. Levin, G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, R. Gibbs, A. Paivio, A. Ortony, T. Todorov, U. Eco, V. P. Grigoryev, N. D. Arutyunova, S. M. Mezenin, and many others.

Despite the variety of approaches to metaphor as a phenomenon the views on its nature and structure are essentially alike. Aristotle in his *On the Art of Poetry* wrote that one should see similarities in order to create a good metaphor (Aristotle 1984: 669). His definition of metaphor as a

transfer of a noun from one object to another (within a category from genus to species, from species to genus, and from species to species, and from one category to another by analogy) lay the foundation for the classical definition of metaphor as a transfer (transposition) of a name of an object/ phenomenon to another object/ phenomenon on the basis similarity between them. This postulate made it possible to view metaphor as a three-component structure on the analogy with simile: the primum, secundum, and tertium comparationis (termed by I. A. Richards the tenor, vehicle and ground) were assumed to be present in metaphor (Richards 1990 [1936]: 93). However, metaphor was regarded as a condensed, abbreviated, or elliptic simile, because it is not infrequent that either the name of the tenor or the vehicle are implicit in metaphors, and the name of the ground is 'in absentia' on a regular basis.

Compare the similes, where all three or at least two components are explicit[1]: e.g. 'Thy wit is as quick as the greyhound's mouth' (Shakespeare), 'she was like a piece of iced-cake that one finds in a silvered box, in a forgotten drawer, . . . thirty years after the voices at the wedding have faded away' (H. E. Bates), 'the men . . . talking ceaselessly together with the dry throaty rattle of pebbles being rolled down a gully' (L. Lee). Of course, in certain structural types of metaphor the vehicle and the tenor are both present, viz. in 'quasi-identities' (T is V), e.g., 'men are April when they woo' (Shakespeare), 'the past is a bucket of ashes' (C. Sandburg); in the types 'T turns into V': 'The river spread and writhed, and whirled into transparent fans, hissing and twining snakes, polished glass-wreaths, huge crystal bells . . .' (H. Kingsley); 'T . . . (that) V' and 'V . . . (that) T': 'A woman drew her long black hair out tight / And fiddled music on those strings' (T. S. Eliot), 'Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety' (Shakespeare); T (attribute) V: 'The human tide was rolling westward' (C. Dickens).

However, in many metaphors the tenor or the vehicle is implicit. Metaphors with vehicles 'in absentia' are understood from the attendant verbs and attributes, e.g., 'Time and the bell have buried the day' (D. Thomas), 'It was a faithless, treasonable door' (W. Davies). Metaphors with tenors 'in absentia' are subtler, riddle-like, and they are understood from a broader context, e.g., 'Ah, women, women. Look, / Our *lamp* is spent, it's out. Good sirs, take heart . . .' (Shakespeare); 'Apollo's *upward fire* made every eastern cloud a silvery pyre' (Keats). The first metaphor echoes similar metaphors for love which occur throughout the play, and is based on the ground that love is the fire that 'burnt' the two lovers. The second tenor is assumed to be guessed from the allusion to the god of Sun (extratextual context). The grounds for the likening in both cases are implicit.

The components of metaphor suggested by I. A. Richards were reduced to two in the theory of interaction by M. Black, who emphasized that there is no inherent similarity (virtual 'ground') between two concepts. He argued that metaphors create similarity, rather than state any preexisting similarity: 'The maker of a metaphorical statement selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the primary subject by applying to it statements isomorphic with the members of the secondary subject's implicative complex' (Black 1990 [1954]: 28). However, according to Black, the interaction of the 'focus' (i.e., the vehicle) and the 'frame' (i.e., the tenor) in metaphors is not direct, it is achieved through the interaction of the correlative properties of the likened concepts. Thus, interpreting Black's view broadly, the number of the components creating metaphors is four, rather than three: focus, its property (-ies), frame, its property (-ies).

M. Black's ideas have been the ground for subsequent theoretic development, especially in George Lakoff's theory of conceptual metaphor, which assumed that a metaphor is a mapping of knowledge from a domain sphere to a target sphere, which results in numerous concrete manifestations (Lakoff 1993). For instance, the mapping A LOVE RELATIONSHIP IS A VEHICLE includes the following sub-mappings on the level of 'basic categories': car (we have a long bumpy road ahead of us; we are spinning our wheels), train (we are off the track in our married life), boat (we are just on the rocks now; our love is foundering), plane (our relationship is just taking off; he bailed out before they got married). Though most influential in the US, Lakoff's theory has not so far struck root firmly in Europe, where the idea of transfer by similarity and the classical rhetorical notion of metaphor have been profoundly elaborated upon (Dubois 1986).

Actually, both the two-sided and three-sided models of metaphor are justified. True, in some cases it is easy to define all the three components of metaphor. This regards noun metaphors with a concrete tenor (here 'concrete' means 'that can be pictured or visualized'). For example, in the above-mentioned example 'Apollo's upward fire' by John Keats the vehicle is 'upward fire,' the tenor is 'the rising sun,' and the ground is similarity of substance and appearance. In the metaphor 'the house of birds' meaning 'the sky,' 'the house of birds' is the vehicle, 'the sky' is the tenor, the likening is based on the similarity of function (ground). A more intricate example: 'Today the leaves cry, hanging on branches swept by wind, / Yet the nothingness of winter becomes a little less' (W. Stevens): V — nothingness; G — lifelessness, uniformity of white and, hence, emptiness; T — winter.

Things are more complex in the case of abstract noun metaphors, where we have an abstract notion, or name of emotion, for a tenor. Such kind of tenor cannot be easily visualized, e.g., I am tired of smoke and mirrors (i.e., illusions, something ephemeral, transient and illusory). In this case there may be two interpretations: either the tenor coincides with the ground and the abstract metaphor is two-sided, or the metaphor is three-sided, but the tenor is outside the metaphor itself and is to be found in the context (any situation which may be characterized as ephemeral or illusory). Another example: '[I] fished in an old wound, / The soft pond of repose, / Nothing nibbled my line, / Not even the minnows came' (T. Roethke): V — an old wound; G — suffering, pain; T — 1) mental suffering or T — 2) a past event which had caused suffering.

As for verb, adjective, and adverb metaphors, in them the vehicle or the ground is often not explicit, but implied. Yet all the three elements (V, G, T), explicit or implied, are fairly easily ascertained, so these types of metaphors are three-sided structures.

For example, 'We've been drinking stagnant water for some twenty years or more / While the politicians slowly planned a bigger reservoir' (L. MacNeice): V (implicit) — animals and masters; G — passively consuming, slowly improving the conditions; T — we, politicians.

E.g., 'But you also have the *slave-owner's* mind' (T. Hughes): V — slave-owner; G (implicit) — exploiting, parasitic; T — you.

It is important not to confuse the referential[2], *or onomasiological* model 'vehicle, tenor and ground,' usually identified on the level of a phrase or a sentence, and the *semasiological*[3] model 'direct meaning, transferred meaning and ground,' which centers on the *word itself*, used metaphorically.

For example, applied to the phrase 'The sky screamed with thunder,' the referential model reveals the following: the vehicle here is implicit, it is a human being, the tenor is the sky and the ground, according to V. Tarasova (1975), is 'the characteristics of an action through another action' (in particular, the ground includes such characteristics as 'loudly, shrilly, frightfully, implying fear, anger or pain'). The semasiological model of metaphor may be applied in this example particularly to the verb 'screamed.' Its direct meaning is 'to cry out with a loud, shrill voice' and its transferred meaning is 'to boom, to rumble (of thunder).' The ground in this model coincides with that in the referential model.

Another treatment of the problem of tertium comparationis in a metaphor is found in P. Wheelwright's theory. The cornerstone of his theory is the dichotomy of Aristotelian 'epiphora' and 'diaphora.' Epiphora is a transfer of a name of an object to another object based on comparison

(i.e., there are apparent points of similarity between the objects compared). Diaphora does not imply any comparison or similarity, but contrast producing certain emotional impact (the effect of baffled expectation); the new meaning there 'results from mere juxtaposition of elements'[4] (Wheelright 1990: 88). Wheelright's cites the following example of diaphora: 'My country 'tis of thee / Sweet land of liberty / Higgledy-piggledy my black hen.'

Scholars suggested numerous classifications of metaphors, which fall roughly into

– semantic;
– structural — including part-of-speech (nounal, verbal, adjectival, adverbial metaphors) and part-of-sentence (substantive, predicative, attributive, adverbial metaphors);
– functional (according to an identifying or characterizing function a metaphor fulfils).

Among *semantic classifications* mention should be made of:

A. The classification based on *associative links between the vehicle and the tenor*, forming the ground for similarity: similarity of functions (the hands of the clock), similarity of form (a bottle's neck), similarity of structure and substance (a flood of tears), similarity of result (he evaporated), etc.

B. The classification based on the *logico-grammatical meaning of the ground* in a metaphor, describing the process of nomination in it (Tarasova 1975). The ground may describe
   – the characteristic of a substance through another substance (for basic nouns) — e.g., 'It [the sun] struck upon the hard sand and the rocks became *furnaces of red heat*' (V. Woolf);
   – the characteristic of a substance through an action (for deverbal nouns) — e.g., '... there was *a stir and bustle* among the stars' (S. Fitzgerald);
   – the characteristic of a substance through a property (for 'qualitative' nouns) — e.g., '... from the desert to the east *a thin crust* of thunder formed like *a scab* upon the melodious silence' (L. Durrel);
   – the characteristic of an action through a substance (for denominative verbs) — e.g., 'They [the waves] *serpented* towards his feet ...' (J. Joyce);
   – the characteristic of an action through another action (for basic verbs) — e.g., 'He watched him closely while he *excavated* his smile' (G. Greene);

- the characteristic of an action through a quality (for deadjectival verbs) — e.g., 'Mrs. Cloudesley Shove *blackens* the doorway with her widowhood' (A. Huxley);
- the characteristic of a quality through a substance (for denominative attributes) — e.g., 'Illige's complexion was *sandy* with them [freckles]. Protectively coloured, the sandy-orange eyebrows and lashes disappeared ... into the skin as a lion dissolves into the desert' (A. Huxley);
- the characteristic of a quality through an action (for deverbal adjectives and participles) — e.g.,'Sometimes at night it had seemed to her as though no one lived here — they had all gone long ago — living lighted houses to be covered in time by *tombing* heaps of sleet' (S. Fitzgerald), 'Only can hear the houses sleeping in the streets in the ... silent black, *bandaged* night' (D. Thomas);
- the characteristic of a quality through another quality (for basic adjectives) — e.g., '... by day beside a livid sea, unbeheld, in violent night walking beneath a reign of *uncouth* stars' (J. Joyce).

C. The classification of metaphors based on the *subject of the vehicle*, for example, part / function of the human body, animal, bird, flower, etc., according to which metaphors may be anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, vegetative, etc. Some elements of such a classification may be found in Mezenin (1984). Examples of anthropomorphic metaphors: 'Luck had *kissed her hand to him*' (O. Henry), 'immaculate *sigh* of stars' (H. Crane), 'the seaweed ... *gave* to us the *murmuring* shore' (A. Tate). Zoomorphic: 'a certain stilled inwardness *lies coiled* in her gaze' (A. Miller), 'the *scorpions* of absolute necessity' (A. Bennett), 'the next two hours tripped by *on rosy wings*' (O. Henry). Vegetative: '*Pluck* from the memory a *rooted* sorrow' (Shakespeare).

Studying one and the same or similar vehicles in various examples of metaphors may prove useful for revealing the associative gamut of the concepts they denote. Likewise, the associative potential of the same or similar tenors may be found, if the reverse analysis is carried out.

D. The classification of metaphors based on the *concreteness / abstractness of the tenor*. The main opposition within tenors is *concrete* versus *abstract notion*. According to the type of vehicle we may speak about concrete (e.g. 'Down rippled the brown cascade [of hair]' [O. Henry]) and abstract metaphors (e.g. 'The real will from its crude compoundings come' [W. Stevens]).

Among structural classifications of metaphors mention should be made of:

A. The classification based *on formal limitations* of metaphor: word-metaphors, phrasal metaphors, propositional (sentence-long), supra-propositional metaphors. Phrasal metaphors include the controversial *binary (genitive) metaphor* — 'marble of a gaze,' 'diamonds of dew,' 'blades of grass.' The controversy associated with it is due to the fact that it is regarded by some scholars not as a metaphor, but either as an interconvertible metaphoric simile or as an interconvertible structure 'modified metaphoric epithet + determined word' (Severskaya 1994). The deep structures of the binary metaphor 'stupor of life' (T. Hughes), for example, viewed as simile will be: primary 'life is like stupor' and secondary 'stupor is like life.' The deep structures of the binary metaphor 'stupor of life' viewed as 'modified metaphoric epithet + determined word' will be: primary 'stupor-stricken life' and secondary 'stupor characteristic of life.'

B. The division into *simple* and *sustained or extended metaphors*. In the latter case one metaphorical statement is followed by another, containing a logical development of the previous metaphor (e.g., This is a day of your golden opportunity. Don't let it turn to brass). This subdivision is classical and commonly known; it is referred to in any book on stylistics or rhetoric.

C. C. Brocke-Rose's classification, based on *the part of speech and the pattern of a metaphor*: noun metaphors (T is V, T turns into V, T . . . that V, V . . . T), adjective, adverb, and verb metaphors with their subdivisions. Let us consider the examples of noun metaphors:
   – 'Take away love and our earth is a tomb' (R. Browning) — 'T is V';
   – 'A flush of pleasure turned Mary's face into a harvest moon' (A. Huxsley) — 'T turns into V';
   – 'Could I come near your beauty with *my nails* / I could set *my ten commandments* in your face' (Shakespeare) — 'T . . . (that) V' and 'V . . . (that) T';
   – 'Oh, Sun-flower! weary of time, / Who countest *the steps of the sun*,' 'There is *a tide in the affairs of men* which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune' (Shakespeare) — 'V is part of, derives from, belongs to or is attributed by C, from which relation we can guess T' (from Maltsev 1980: 104–108).

The *functional classification* of metaphors, suggested by N. D. Arutyunova (Arutyunova 1976: ch. 6), which conceptually draws on C. Morris's pragmatic classification of words, divides them into *identifying*

(classifying) and *predicating (characterizing)*. This classification is based on the assumption, that the semantic content of words is formed in compliance of their role in an utterance. The basic commmunicative functions of a sentence are identification of subjects of speech and predication, introducing their properties and characteristics, and the pragmatic meanings of words adapt themselves to these functions. In identifying words the denotation (referential, denominative component of meaning) is more prominent than the signification (the designating, characterizing component of meaning). There are monofunctional speech signs: only identifying — proper names and pronouns (deictic words, 'shifters'), only characterizing — non-referential words, i.e., verbs and attributes; and bifunctional, fulfilling both the identifying and characterizing functions (most common nouns) dependent on their specific role in a sentence.

Examples of identifying metaphors: 'Fished in an *old wound* …' (T. Roethke), 'all his efforts to concoct / *The old heroic bang* … [= poetry]' (T. Hughes), 'O *small dust of the earth* that walks so arrogantly' (M. Moore), 'breathing on the *base rejected clay*' (W. Moody).

Examples of characterizing metaphors: 'We've been *drinking stagnant water* for some twenty years or more / While the politicians slowly *planned a bigger reservoir*' (L. McNiece), 'Consider these … / *Born barren, a freak growth, root in rubble*, / *Fruitlessly blossoming, whose foliage suffocates*' (E. Foxall), 'snail, snail, *glister me forward*, / Bird, *soft-sigh me home*' (T. Roethke).

In identifying mertaphors the patterns Concrete Vehicle — Abstract Tenor and Concrete Vehicle — Concrete Tenor by far surpass the other two patterns, Abstract Vehicle — Abstract Tenor and Abstract Vehicle — Concrete Tenor. In characterizing metaphors the pattern Concrete Attribute1 — Abstract Attribute2 predominates over the others.[5]

The commonly recognized phenomena cases cognate with metaphor are metaphoric personification (prosopopoeia, pathetic fallacy, apostrophe), animalification, metaphoric antonomasia, metaphoric allusion, metaphoric periphrasis, synaesthesia, allegory, and metaphoric symbolism.

Metaphoric personification (animalification) is regarded as a specific metaphor, where a thing or phenomenon are endowed with features peculiar to human beings or live creatures, e.g., 'the *Mediterranean* … more than five thousand years *has drunk sacrifice* of ships and blood' (J. Jeffers); *the city streets, perplexed, perverse, delay my hurrying footsteps*' (E. Pound); 'the *age demanded an image of its accelerated grimace*' (E. Pound); '… *the phrases* that insistently *barked* inside his brain' (J. Wain).

Peculiar cases of metaphoric personification are prosopopoeia — endowing inanimate objects with speech, while they remain what they are — e.g., 'Shovel them [bodies] under and let me work / I am the grass;

I cover all' (C. Sandburg), pathetic fallacy — the conception of natural objects as being friendly or hostile to mankind — e.g., '. . . the trees against the church wall bow their heads, and wring their many hands in sympathy' (C. Dickens), and apostrophe — a direct address to things or abstract notions thus endowing them with consciousness — e.g., 'Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean — roll!' (G. G. Byron).

Allusion is commonly understood as a reference to something presumably known to the interlocutor or reader, frequently from literature and mythology, to show the similarity between a proverbial fact and the real fact. 'Phoenix rising from the ashes,' 'the Augean stables,' 'the mountain and Mahomet,' 'the last of the Mohicans' are but the most evident cases. Most allusions are not so glaring, but subtler cases, e.g., a hidden allusion to the biblical plot (Mark 11: 12–26) in 'Tribute' by A. Coppard: 'dignity is so much less than simple faith that it is unable to move even one mountain, it charms the hearts only of bank managers and bishops.'

Metaphoric periphrasis is circumlocution, roundabout renaming on the basis of similarity, pointing to and thus intensifying some property or relation of an object, the total effect being humor or elevation of style. Metaphoric and metonymic periphrases can be traced in kennings in Anglo-Saxon poetry — the conventional poetic phrases used for the actual name of a person or thing, as 'wave traveller' (boat), 'cavern-warder' (monster), 'ring-giver' (king). A great master of periphrasis is O. Henry: 'And then to the waiter he betrayed the fact that the minutest coin and himself were strangers,' 'a singular committee of Ways and Means' (prison).

Metaphoric antonomasia is the use of a proper name of a famous person for a common one, e.g., 'Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest, / Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood' (T. Gray); a Napoleon of crime, a Gioconda smile. Telltale (speaking) names, like Mr. Know-it-all, Sheridan's Lady Sneerwell, Sir Peter Teazle from 'School of Scandal,' Dickens' Murdstone from 'David Copperfield,' are sometimes regarded as a subtype of antonomasia.

Synesthesia is commonly understood as a transfer by similarity of primary perceptions, occurring in adjectives, nouns denoting qualities, and sometimes in verbs. The common types of 'lexical' synesthesia are: a) transfer of physical perceptions to other physical perceptions (mild cheese, light, voice; loud voice, color; rough food, country, sound, etc.); b) transfer of physical perceptions to mental and emotional phenomena (loose hair, behavior; strong man, criticism; open house, open, man; to seize a hand, an idea, power); c) the reverse of the previous — transfer of psychological state to objects and phenomena of reality (a sad fact, situation; to be sorry, a sorry façade); emotive connotations from a notion

to another notion (a rotten egg, apple, weather, driver, to feel rotten). Synesthesia is widespread in poetic speech, e.g., 'And round about were the *wistful* stars / With white faces like town children' (T. Hulme), 'Till, with a sudden sharp hot *stink* of fox / It [the thought] enters the dark hole of the head' (T. Hughes).

Metaphoric symbol is the synthetic sign of culture with a hierarchy of designata, with the primary designatum corresponding to the immediate meaning of a designator, and secondary designata being more general and abstract and connected with the primary designatum by metaphoric links (e.g., rose — beauty, love; wall — obstacle, restriction of freedom, estrangement; mountain — spiritual elevation; way — course of life). For more detail on metaphoric symbols see (Shelestiuk 2003). Related to metaphoric symbolism is allegory — a passage or a complete literary work of symbolic nature that can be treated as an elaborate and continuous metaphor.

In the present paper, I sought to present a systematized view on the contemporary understanding of metaphor, its essence and structure, to review various classifications of metaphor, and list cognate 'similarity-based' phenomena in speech. The opposing views on metaphor as a three- and two-component structure are reconciled in the article through the analysis of different kinds of metaphors. Three types of classifications of metaphor — semantic, structural and functional — are specified and reviewed. Finally, the article examines the cognate phenomena, viz. metaphoric personification (prosopopoeia, pathetic fallacy, apostrophe), animalification, metaphoric antonomasia, metaphoric allusion, metaphoric periphrasis, synesthesia, allegory and metaphoric symbolism.

Notes

1. The examples for illustrations in the present article are taken from the quoted theoretical papers and several anthologies of poetry (Arinstein 1984; Jimbinov 1983; Ellmann and O'Clair 1973; Matthiessen 1950).
2. I.e. proceeding from a referent — a designated object.
3. I.e. proceeding from the meaning of a word.
4. Diaphora seems to correspond to what is termed 'a semi-defined structure of lexical type' in present-day linguistics.
5. Our percentage analysis of identifying and characterizing metaphors and metonymies revealed, that while in identifying tropes the rating of patterns is essentially the same, in characterizing metaphors and metonymies there is a vast discrepancy: the pattern Concrete Attribute1 — Abstract Attribute2 predominates in metaphors, whereas in characterizing metonymies (names of abstract notions) the pattern Abstract Vehicle (= Tenor's Attribute) — Concrete Tenor appears to be exclusive. An example of a characterizing metonymy: 'trust begets power and faith is an affectionate thing (= people believing in God are spiritually strong and full of godly love)' (M. Moore).

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